

'Good' students no longer all that good

By DIANA SMITH

(CPS) — If you've ever wondered who commits crime on campus, look around. It could be the woman sitting next to you in class, or the guy who lives down the hall in the dormitory. Then again, it could be you.

A series of surveys conducted by a University of Nebraska criminal justice professor indicate that a majority of American students — more than 50 percent — candidly admit to stealing money and property, driving drunk, cheating on tests, and vandalizing property, to mention a few crimes.

Even more surprising are results that indicate most students also consider themselves to be good citizens and think the "real" criminals should be given harsher punishments for their crimes. And the problem isn't confined to the United States. A survey of students in New Zealand produced similar results.

"The students view themselves to be high-minded, law-abiding citizens, yet their behavior indicates otherwise," said Chris Eskridge, who teaches at the University of Nebraska-Omaha.

In the surveys, 3,417 students at the University of Nebraska-Omaha were queried over an eight-year period (1984-91) about whether they ever had committed any of 22 criminal acts. A group of 542 students at the University of Canterbury at Christchurch, New Zealand, answered the same questionnaire in March and April 1992. Eskridge compared the data and presented his findings at the annual meeting of the Western Society of Criminology in February.

Statistics adjusted to compensate for differences in age, gen-

der, and other factors showed that:

- 58 percent of American students, compared with 57 percent of New Zealanders, admitted stealing less than \$10.

- 75 percent of Americans and 50 percent of the New Zealand students said they had driven while drunk.

- 81 percent of the Americans and 52 percent of the New Zealanders cheated on a test.

- 64 percent of the Americans said they had stolen items from motels or hotels while only 42 percent of New Zealanders said they had done so.

- 53 percent of Americans smoked marijuana, compared with 51 percent of New Zealanders.

- 11 percent of the Americans said they had stolen from their roommates, compared with nine percent of New Zealanders.

- 20 percent of Americans said they had carried a concealed weapons, while 17 percent of the New Zealanders admitted doing so.

- 20.7 percent of American women students said they had been raped, compared with 17.6 percent of the female New Zealanders. However, only 6.4 percent of the American men students said they had forced a woman to have sex against her will, with 4.7 percent of New Zealand men admitting to the crime.

Eskridge said he found the statistics "extremely disturbing," although he suspected that students of the 1980's and 1990's just may be more upfront about their criminal activity than those of previous generations.

"I don't know if young people are lying and cheating any more than their parents did. It's just

that we're more aware of it now," he said.

There were some obvious weaknesses with the surveys, including the possibility that students might lie or exaggerate, but the similarities between the responses by American and New Zealand students indicated there was some general validity to the findings, Eskridge said. Other studies, including some done by the FBI, have shown similar results, he noted.

The statistics that Eskridge said he found the most disturbing were the ones that indicated some "cognitive dissonance" on the part of students who feel that their own criminal behavior is fine but others' is not.

Eight-seven percent of the American students and 81 percent of the New Zealand students said they considered themselves to be law-abiding citizens, and 74 percent of the Americans and 65 percent of the New Zealanders advocated giving harsher penalties to criminals.

"What seems to keep the majority of students from being legally defined as criminal seems to be the mere fact that they have not yet been caught and/or convicted," the professor said in the study's conclusion.

Particularly interesting is the difference in responses on the last two questions. Americans were tougher in their opinions about criminals even though they admitted participating in more criminal incidents — an average of 6.31 out of 22 — compared with an average of 4.85 crimes for the New Zealand students.

"It would appear that American students might be a bit more callused, have a more inflated image of themselves, and/or are more capable of rationalizing be-

havior than are New Zealand students," Eskridge wrote.

Although most people consider themselves scrupulously honest, Eskridge said the truth is that everybody cheats a little now and then. Managers take home pens from the office; workers shave an extra 20 minutes from their eight-hour days; parents do their kids' homework.

"The manager of the convenience store embezzles; the kid steals a Twinkie from the store," he said. "People steal in ways that are available to them."

Eskridge should know. Before becoming a college professor, he worked in the white-collar crime division of an attorney general's office, so the results of the surveys weren't entirely surprising.

"It's disheartening, and it's troublesome... But is there any difference between the robber barons of the 1880's and the robber barons of the 1980's? They get

away with it; kids see that," he said. "Isn't that part of the American way? Get away with it... The winners write the rules, not the losers.

"I think the whole country is moving in that direction. We're a nation of lying, cheating thieves," Eskridge said, noting that the robber barons of the 1700s and 1800s who helped establish the nation are considered heroes today, although many of them basically lied, cheated, and stole their way to success.

Another recent study seems to bear out Eskridge's data on cheating among college students.

Donald McCabe of Rutgers University in New Jersey surveyed more than 6,000 students at 31 American universities and found that 67 percent admitted to having cheated at least once during their academic careers, according to a Sept. 10 story in the *North Carolina State Technician*.

TOP TEN MOST CLUELESS PEOPLE ON EARTH

10. Rainforest chainsaw operator.
9. Millionaires in prison.
8. Drivers with turn signal perpetually on.
7. Las Vegas lounge acts.
6. Unregistered voters.
5. Frozen dinner enthusiasts.
4. Javelin catcher.
3. Someone in express checkout line with eleven items.
2. Chain-smoking gas station attendant.
1. Drug users.

PARTNERSHIP FOR A DRUG-FREE AMERICA

Job market deteriorates

(CPS) — The job market deteriorated significantly for young college graduates during the recent recession and has not yet stabilized, according to officials at the U.S. Department of Labor.

Executive and professional jobs are scarce, with fewer graduates taking professional positions and more are being forced to accept clerical and support positions, according to a new report.

The study, "Are College Educated Young Persons Finding

Good Jobs?," was written by Paul Ryscavage of the U.S. Census Bureau and reveals that unemployment for 16- to 24-year-old has risen from 1988 to 1991, and the types of jobs available are changing in character.

"Joblessness among college-educated men aged 16 to 24 who were not in school rose sharply from nearly five percent in 1988 to almost eight percent in 1991, and the jobless rate for women rose from almost five percent to

slightly over six percent," the report said.

The number of young persons with college educations entering high-paying jobs such as executives, administrative, managerial, and professional positions, fell from 53.6 percent in 1989 to 48.4 percent in 1991. At the same time, the report revealed, the numbers entering technical, sales, and administrative support jobs, including clerical, rose from 33.4 percent to 38.2 percent.